Factors Characterizing Good Language learners and Their Pedagogical Implications for Teaching Listening and Speaking

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العوامل التي تميّز متعلمي اللغة الجيدين وآثارها التربوية على تدريس مهارتي الاستماع والتحدث

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Abstract:
Research on second and foreign language acquisition has increasingly focused on examining the factors that distinguish good language learners (GLLs) and the role these factors play in successful learning. This study aims to identify the key learner-related factors, strategies, environments, and instructional practices that contribute to effective language learning, with particular emphasis on the development of listening and speaking skills. Drawing on a qualitative narrative review approach, synthesizing findings from previous empirical and theoretical studies published between (1970-2025) related to the fields of language education and applied linguistics, the study examines a range of learner characteristics, including age, language aptitude, personality, learning style, attitude, and motivation, as well as the learning strategies and techniques commonly employed by GLLs. The study also discusses the roles of the learning environment and instructional practices in supporting the development of learners' oral communicative competence. The findings of the review indicate that successful development of listening and speaking skills is associated with the integration of cognitive, affective, and instructional factors, and with a shift from traditional teaching practices to interactive. learner-cantered approaches. The study concludes by presenting a set of pedagogical implications and practical suggestions for teachers of second and foreign language, emphasizing that the characteristics of GLLs are not fixed innate traits but rather acquired competencies that can be developed through informed and research-based instructional practices.

Keywords: Good Language Learners, Learner's Factors, Listening and Speaking Skills, Second and Foreign Language Acquisition, Pedagogical Implications.

الملخص:
شهدت دراسات اللغات الثانية والأجنبية اهتماماً متزايداً ملحوظاً بتحليل العوامل التي تميّز متعلمي اللغة الجيدين، ودور هذه العوامل في تحقيق تعلّم لغوي ناجح. يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحديد أبرز العوامل المرتبطة بالمتعلم، واستراتيجيات التعلّم، والبيئة التعلّمية، والممارسات التدريسية التي تُسهم في تعلّم اللغة بفاعلية، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على تنمية مهارتي الاستماع والتحدث. واستناداً على منهج المراجعة السردية النوعية للأدبيات، من خلال تحليل وتركيب نتائج دراسات تجريبية ونظرية سابقة منشورة بين عامين (1970-2025) تتعلّق بالمجلات التربوية واللغوية، يعرض البحث مجموعة

من خصائص المتعلمين مثل العمر، والاستعداد اللغوي، والشخصية، ونمط التعلّم، والاتجاهات، والدافعية، فضلا عن استراتيجيات وتقنيات التعلم التي يوظفها متعلّمو اللغة الجيدون. كما يناقش البحث دور البيئة التعلّمية وأساليب التدريس في دعم تنمية الكفاءة التواصلية الشفوية لدي المتعلّمين. وتُظهر نتائج المراجعة أن نجاح تنمية مهارتي الاستماع والتحدث يرتبط بتكامل العوامل المعرفية والانفعالية والتدريسية، وبالتحوّل من الممارسات التقليدية الي مداخل تعليمية تفاعلية تتمحور حول المتعلّم. وتخلص الدراسة إلى مجموعة من الدلالات التربوية والمقترحات التطبيقية الموجّهة لمعلّمي اللغات الثانية والأجنبية، مؤكدةً أن خصائص متعلّمي اللغة الجيدين لا تُعدّ سماتٍ فطريةً ثابتة، بل كفاياتٍ مكتسبةٌ قابلةٌ للتنمية، يمكن تعزيزها من خلال ممارساتٍ تدريسيةٍ واعيةٍ تستند إلي نتائج البحث التربوي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: متعلّمو اللغة الجيدون، عوامل المتعلّم، مهارتا الاستماع والتحدث، اكتساب اللغات الثانية والأجنبية، الدلالات التربوية.

Introduction:

There has been growing interest in identifying the factors that characterize good language learners (GLLs), and there is a general belief that such factors can assist learners in becoming more effective in their language learning processes (Hajar & Karakus, 2025; Nunan, 1995a). It is further believed that "learners who have developed skills in learning-how-to-learn will continue with language learning outside of the classroom" (Wong & Nunan, 2011, p. 144). Understanding these factors is particularly important for teaching listening and speaking skills, which are a central to communicative competence.

Research has shown that successful language learners possess specific characteristics, employ effective learning strategies, benefit from supportive learning environment, and respond positively to inform teaching processes. Learner-related factors such as age, aptitude, personality, learning style, attitude, and motivation paly critical roles in language acquisition (Griffiths, 2008; Skehan, 1998). In addition, strategic behaviors, including active task involvement, self-monitoring, and manage affective demands, have been shown to enhance learning outcomes (Naiman et al., 1978; Rubin, 1975). Beyond individual traits and strategies, environmental and instructional factors, including classroom interaction, exposure to authentic language, and teacher support, also significantly influence learners' development of listening and speaking skills (Amil, 2025; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

By synthesizing findings both seminal and recent research, this study seeks to provide insights into how successful language learners operate and how these insights can be applied to improve classroom instruction.

Statement of the Problem:

Despite the substantial body of research identifying the characteristics and strategies of GLLs, the pedagogical implications of this research, especially for the development of listening and speaking skills, remain underexplored. Much of the literature examines learner-related or instructional factors in isolation, which limits teachers' ability to translate research findings into coherent classroom practices. This gap highlights the need for comprehensive synthesis that integrates learner, strategic, environmental, and instructional factors and clarifies how they can inform effective approaches to develop teaching listening and speaking skills in second and foreign language settings.

Research Questions:
This study seeks to address the following research questions:
1. What factors contribute to making successful language learners?
2. How can teachers develop students' listening and speaking skills in the most realistic way based on the successful learners' factors?

Aims of the Study:
The main aims of this study are:
1. To identify general factors that contribute to the success of language learners, including learner-related, strategic, environmental, and instructional factors.
2. To examine how insights from research on good language learners can inform practical teaching approaches for improving listening and speaking skills in second and foreign language contexts.

Significance of the Study:

This study is significant because it provides a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics, strategies, and environmental conditions that distinguish successful language learners. By synthesizing previous empirical and theoretical research, the study offers practical implications for second language (SL) and foreign language (FL) teachers, emphasizing that the factors contributing to successful language learning are developable and can be fostered through informed instructional practices. Additionally, it highlights effective methods for enhancing listening and speaking skills, which are crucial for communicative competence and overall language proficiency.

Literature Review:
Good Language Learners (GLLs):

It is acknowledged that certain factors enable SL and/or FL learners to acquire a language more effectively. These factors facilitate learners' progression from beginner levels toward native-like competence. While not all factors are fully known, successful learners possess most of these factors, which distinguish them from less proficient learners.

Betal & Banerjee (2023) classify the factors influencing the learning into two main types, namely internal and external factors. Internal factors, such as motivation, cognitive abilities, and personality traits, are crucial in determining learning success. Learners with higher motivation and positive attitudes towards the target language tend to show greater persistence and faster progress. External factors, including cultural, social, and environmental aspects, also significantly enhance learning opportunities, reducing language anxiety and increasing engagement.

In addtion, Naiman et al. (1978) identified four major types of learning factors that contribute to successful language learning.

1. **Learner characteristics:** Include age, cognitive factors (e.g., language aptitude), personality traits, learning style, attitude, and motivation.
2. **Learning processes:** Include strategies and techniques employed to acquire the new language.
3. **Learning environment:** Include classroom and beyond –classroom conditions that influence development.
4. **Teaching processes:** Include instructional methods and teacher behaviors that affect learners' performance.

The following section examines these factors in greater details, as identified by Naiman et al. (1978), while integrating findings from several studies to gain a clearer understanding of the concept of 'good language learners.

Learner Characteristics:

There have been many attempts to identify the characteristics of good SL/FL learners in order to support less successful learners. Although Naiman et al. (1978) argued that "the successful or good language learner, with predetermined overall characteristics, does not exist" (p.ix), empirical research has demonstrated that successful learners tend to share a set of characteristics that make them proficient in acquiring a new language (Atmowardoyo et al., 2023). The following sections illustrate these characteristics in more detail.

1. Age:

Research findings indicate that age is an important factor in SL and FL learning success. Studies have shown that younger learners often achieve higher levels of pronunciation accuracy and long-term fluency than older learners (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016; Griffiths, 2008; Cook, 1992; Harley ,1986). Griffiths (2008) reported that early exposure to a second language facilitates more native-like competence, particularly in phonological development. However, results also suggested that older learners might outperform younger learners in explicit grammar learning and metacognitive awareness (Krogulec, 2019; Imlach et al. 2017).

Overall, the findings confirm that age influences language-learning success, as "common observation tells us that children are 'better' language learners than adults" (Brown & Lee, 2025, p. 13). Thus, younger learners generally have an advantage in implicit language acquisition.

2. Language aptitude:

Empirical studies on language aptitude indicate that GLLs demonstrate higher levels of phonetic and grammatical sensitivity (Wen et al., 2017). Skehan (1989) found that learners with strong phonetic coding ability were more successful in perceiving and storing unfamiliar sounds, resulting in improved pronunciation and listening comprehension. Thus, Skehan (1989) defined phonetic analysis as "the ability to perform some sort of analysis on unfamiliar foreign sounds and also the ability to transform the sound into a form more amenable to storage (p. 26).

Furthermore, Skehan (1998) showed that learners with strong grammatical ability were better at identifying language patterns and applying rules to new contexts. Accordingly, Skehan (1998) defined the grammatical as "the capacity to infer rules of language and make linguistic generalizations or extrapolations" (p. 204).

3. Personality:

Research on personality traits, such as openness to experience, conscientiousness, and extraversion, has revealed that certain characteristics are commonly associated with successful language learners (Gu & Sharil, 2023; Sobhanmanesh, 2022) . Richards et al. (1998, p. 430) defined personality as "those aspects of an individual's behaviour, attitudes, beliefs, thought, actions, and feelings which are seen as typical and distinctive of the person and recognized as such by that person and others".

In other words, Richards et al. (1998) emphasized that confident, reflective, and self-directed learners tend to achieve higher proficiency levels. Empirical findings suggest that traits such as self-confidence, willingness to take risks, and perseverance positively correlate with communicative competence (Fan et al., 2024; Cervatiuc, 2007). Studies also show that GLLs actively monitor their learning process, set goals, and seek opportunities for practice, which contributes to language development (Xu, 2025).

4. Learning style:

Studies investigating learning styles indicate that successful learners are not limited to a single preferred learning modality (Lokare & Jadhav, 2024; Husnia et al., 2023; Salam & Arifin, 2020). Claxton and Ralston (1978, p.7) defined learning style as "learners' consistent ways of responding to and using stimuli in the context of learning". However, Nel (2008) reported that GLLs demonstrate flexibility in adopting different learning styles depending on task demands.

Research results show that learners who can effectively integrate different modalities— such as visual, auditory, kinesthetic, individual, and group-based learning strategies—achieve better comprehension than those who rely on only one approach (Husnia et al., 2023; Salam & Arifin, 2020).

5. Attitde:

Another crucial factor in second and foreign language learning is attitude, which was defined by Sarnoff (1970) as "a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to class or objects" (p.279). Rasti (2009) defined attitudes as the extent to which students accept the subject and express opinions towards it. Syukur (2016) viewed attitude as "a tendency to respond positively or negatively towards a certain thing, idea, person, or situation etc." (p. 124).

Syukur (2016) reported that learners with positive attitudes were more likely to participate actively in class and use language learning strategies effectively. Lubis (2015, p. 19) further claimed that "a positive attitude often leads learners to use a variety of learning strategies that can facilitate skill development in language learning" which in turn distinguish proficient learners from less proficient ones. Studies also show that learners with positive attitudes toward the target language and its speakers demonstrated higher engagement and persistence (Aldabbus & Alaziby, 2025; Baxtiyarovich, 2024).

6.Motivation:

Motivation has been identified as one of the most influential factors in SL and FL learning. Ushioda (2008) claimed that "motivation concerns what moves a person to make certain choices, to engage in action, and to persist in action" (p. 19). Empirical studies (Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; Rajab et al., 2012; Alizadeh, 2016; Spratt et al., 2002; Nugroho et al., 2020; Baxtiyarovich, 2024)) reported that highly motivated learners demonstrate greater proficiency levels and increased willingness to communicate in the target language.

The results further indicate that motivation not only affects achievement indirectly through effort but also directly influences learners' communicative behavior and long-term language success (Rajab et al., 2012; Alizadeh, 2016).

Learning Strategies and Techniques:

A considerable number of studies have indicated that the frequent and effective use of learning strategies is a key factor that distinguishes high-level language learners from low-level ones (Rubin, 1975; Naiman et al., 1978; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Griffiths, 2008; Anderson, 2005; Oxford, 1996; Cohen, 1998). These studies emphasize that strategic behavior plays a central role in successful language acquisition.

Researchers have attempted to provide clear and comprehensive definitions of the strategies employed by successful learners. Rubin (1975) defined strategies as "the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge" (p.43). Moreover, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) described learning strategies as "the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information" (p.1). Griffiths (2008) further viewed strategies as "activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own language learning" (p.87). These definitions highlight the conscious and purposeful nature of strategy use in language learning.

The aim of these studies was to provide a comprehensive overview of what the strategies and techniques that the successful learners adopt. For instance, Rubin (1975) compiled a list of strategies commonly used by successful learners, including the ability to guess meaning from context, employ various communication techniques, and practice the target language regularly. In the same vein, Griffiths (2008) observed that high-level learners use certain strategies more frequently to regulate their learning process. These learners tend to be autonomous, learn from their errors, and complete assigned tasks consistently.

Moreover, successful learners make extensive use of available resources, such as consulting teachers, using dictionaries, and engaging with media like television and movies. They also recognize the importance of the social dimension of language learning by interacting with native speakers. In

addition, GLLs employ strategies that enhance their performance in the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), while expanding their vocabulary and improving grammatical competence.

In recent years, technology has become an important component of second and foreign language learning, providing learners with increased exposure, interaction, and autonomy. Chapelle (2009) argued that technology-assisted language learning offers learners meaningful input and opportunities for interaction that are essential for language development. Furthermore, Chun (2016) suggested that SLA is moving in the direction of normalization which refers to "a state where technology is fully integrated into second language teaching and learning and is no longer special or unusual, in the way that books, pencils, and blackboards were in traditional classrooms"(p.107). Similarly, Warschauer (2013) emphasized that digital technologies expand learning beyond the classroom by enabling access to authentic materials and real communicative contexts.

The internet, in particular, has been widely utilized as a valuable resource for language learning due to its rich multimedia content. Studies have shown that exposure to online technology enhances teaching methods and students' knowledge (Schofield & Davidson, 2003; Timucin, 2006; Alm, 2009; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2014). Successful language learners use these resources by selecting content appropriate to their proficiency level and learning objectives, which helps sustain motivation and facilitates language input. In addition, GLLs benefit from online sources, such as videos, podcasts, and digital texts, to improve their listening comprehension, vocabulary development, and culture awareness.

Moreover, research has demonstrated that online communication tools support the development of communicative competence. According to Lee (2011) and Such (2021) interaction through social networking platforms enhances learners' writing fluency and pragmatic competence. GLLs actively engage in these online environments to practice speaking and writing, negotiate meaning, and receive feedback from peers and native speakers. Mobile-assisted language learning studies further indicate that successful learners use language learning applications to review vocabulary, practice pronunciation, and reinforce grammar outside formal settings (Arnedo, 2025; Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008).

Generally, Naiman et al. (1978, pp.30-33) identified five major strategies that characterize successful language learners.
-   **Strategy 1: Active task involvement**: GLLs actively engage in language tasks by responding positively to learning opportunities, seeking suitable learning environments, increasing practice activities, identifying personal learning difficulties, and adjusting task objectives to support language development.
-   **Strategy 2: Awareness of language as a system**: Successful learners develop an understanding of language as a structured system. They make effective use of their first language for comparison, analyze the target language, draw inferences, and apply learning techniques that reflect the systematic nature of language.
-   **Strategies 3: Awareness of language as a means of communication and interaction**: GLLs view language as a tool for communication. In the early stages, they often prioritize fluency over accuracy, seek opportunities to interact with native speakers, and demonstrate sensitivity to sociocultural aspects of language use.
-   **Strategy 4: Managing affective demands**: Successful learners recognize the emotional challenges associated with the language learning and develop strategies to cope with anxiety, frustration, and lack of confidence.
-   **Strategies 5: Monitoring performance**: GLLs continuously monitor their progress by testing hypotheses about the language, making necessary adjustments, and seeking feedback from native speakers when appropriate.

In addition, Naiman et al. (1978, pp.33-36) identified several techniques commonly used by GLLs. These include techniques related to sound acquisition, such as repetition after teachers or native speakers; grammar learning, such as following rules presented in textbooks; and vocabulary development, including creating and memorizing word lists. Moreover, listening comprehension through exposure to radio, television, and films; speaking through interaction with native speakers; writing through frequent practice and extensive reading; and reading through engagement with various written materials such as newspapers, magazines, and professional texts.

Learning Environment:

Besides learners' characteristics and learning strategies, a supportive environment is crucial for successful language acquisition. Research has shown that different aspects of the environment, including academic, physical, social and psychological dimensions, have a direct impact on learners' achievement (kiatkheeree, 2018; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2022; Amil, 2025). These dimensions interact with learners' cognitive and affective processes, making the learning environment a central factor in explaining individual differences among successful language learners.

1. **The academic environment:** refers to instructional quality, curriculum design, feedback practice, and opportunities for meaningful language use. Research has shown that environment that promote interaction, autonomy, and task-based learning contribute to higher levels of learners' engagement and language development (Amil, 2025).
2. **The physical environment:** includes factors such as classroom layout, noise levels, overcrowding, and access to learning resources, all of which may influence learners' concentration and willingness to participate. Recent studies suggest that flexible and well-resourced physical spaces can facilitate communication and collaborative learning, whereas poor physical conditions may hinder interaction and focus (Han et al., 2019).
3. **The social environment:** refers to interpersonal relationships, peer support, and opportunities for meaningful communication. Research indicates that strong teacher-student interaction, peer collaboration, and group work can enhance learners' motivation and fluency (Amil, 2025).
4. **The psychological environment:** involves learners' emotional experiences (e.g., enjoyment, anxiety), motivation, and awareness of the learning process. Research highlights the importance of fostering positive emotions such as enjoyment, confidence, and a sense of belonging in the language classroom (Zhang & Wang, 2025). These findings align with Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, which posits that low-anxiety environments facilitate language acquisition by allowing learners to process input more effectively.

Within classrooms settings, early research by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) demonstrated that successful language learners actively participate, produce a large amount of language output, and employ a wide range of cognitive, metacognitive, and social learning strategies. More recent studies confirm that classrooms, which encourage collaboration, peer interaction, and learner autonomy promote strategic behavior and deeper engagement with the target language (Oxford, 2016; Al-Hoorie & MacIntyre, 2020).

Beyond the classroom, successful learners who deliberately seek exposure to the target language through interaction with proficient speakers, digital platforms, or authentic media demonstrate greater fluency and pragmatic competence (Peters & Webb, 2018; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). Recent research highlights the growing importance of informal and digital learning environments, such as social media, online communities, and mobile-assisted language learning, in increasing language exposure and fostering learner autonomy (Lee & Lee, 2021; Xodabande et al., 2025; Tian & Umar, 2025).

Overall, recent research strongly supports the view that a conducive learning environment reduces anxiety, enhances motivation, and increases opportunities for meaningful interaction, all of which are essential for successful language acquisition. As kiatkheeree (2018) argued that "a conducive learning environment facilitates the success of EFL learners in acquiring the language" (p.47). Therefore, the learning environment should be viewed as a dynamic and integral component of successful language learning rather than a marginal factor.

Teaching Processes:

Teachers play a crucial role in shaping learners' success, as their characteristics, beliefs, and instructional behaviors can either motivate or hinder students' language learning. Research in second language acquisition (SLA) continues to confirm that teaching processes extend beyond the transmission of linguistic knowledge to include affective support, classroom interaction, and instructional decision-making (Lan, 2025).

Zamani and Ahangari (2016) stated that "the teacher seems to take the key role in facilitating the students' learning and the characteristics of the teacher may influence the students' learning process to some extents" (p.69). This view is consistent with earlier work by Kounin (1970), who described effective teachers as those who are able to manage classroom behavior efficiently, handle multiple classroom events smoothly, and maintain group focus during instruction (as cited in Zamani & Ahangari, 2016, p. 72). Together these findings suggest that effective teaching processes have a strong influence on learners' performance and overall success.

From the learners' perspective, effective teaching is associated with relational and motivational practices that reflect a learner-centred approach, in which emotional support and interaction play a crucial role. Zamani and Ahangari (2016) found that students perceive the effective teachers as those who are able to:
1. Develop positive teacher-student relationships.
2. Build learners' confidence.
3. Maintain discipline in supportive ways.
4. Create an enjoyable classroom atmosphere.
5. Listen to students' views and foster expression.
6. Promote communicative activities and discussions.

7. Make lessons engaging and sustain attention.

Teaching processes also involve the quality and nature of teacher-student interaction, particularly the way teachers adapt instruction to learners' proficiency levels. Teaching in this sense, refers to how teachers interact with students and whether they provide equal learning opportunities for both high-and low-proficiency learners. Although GLLs tend to participate more actively in classroom tasks, research suggests that effective teachers do not deliberately favor these learners. Chaudron (2001) observed that teachers do not show differential treatment toward proficient or less proficient learners. Instead, teachers tend to modify their speech by using shorter utterances and simplify complex vocabulary to ensure comprehension among lower-level learners.

Recent empirical studied support this view, demonstrating the importance of the teacher's role as a motivational and psychological resource. Teacher support has been shown to reduce foreign language anxiety, enhance learners' willingness to communicate, and foster positive emotional experiences such as enjoyment and academic flexibility (Huang et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2024). Moreover, recent studies indicate that teacher support indirectly contributes to successful language learning by promoting learners' self-regulation, grit, and positive language mindsets (Zhong & Wang, 2025).

After examining the factors that contribute to the success GLLs, the following section focuses on how teachers can make use of these factors to develop learners' listening and speaking skills.

Teaching Listening and Speaking:

Listening and speaking are fundamental language skills that require both linguistic knowledge and continuous practice. Research shows that these skills are the best developed using authentic and meaningful activities that allow learners to apply language in realistic contexts (Thornbury, 2005). Studies indicate that when learners engage in realistic listening and speaking tasks, they develop communicative competence rather than merely acquiring declarative knowledge that remains unused outside the classroom (Long, 2014). Thornbury (2005) emphasized that such activities enable learners to practice listening and speaking as skills, rather than as abstract knowledge separated from real-life use.

Bygate (2001) illustrated the distinction between knowledge and skill through the analogy of learning to drive a car: knowing the names and functions of car controls is insufficient without the ability to use them effectively. Empirical findings suggest that language learners require opportunities to practice language use in order to transform linguistic knowledge into communicative skill (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). As Bygate (2001) argued "clarifying the distinction between knowledge and skill is pedagogically important because each requires different instructional approaches, even though both can be practiced and improved" (p.5). Nevertheless, research also confirms that knowledge and skill are interdependent; learners need a foundation of linguistic knowledge to develop effective listening and speaking abilities. Therefore, instruction in listening and speaking typically begins with the provision of essential knowledge, which learners then apply through communicative practice.

Developing Listening Skills:

White (2008) reported that "listening is usually the first skill learners develop, serving as the primary source of input in both first and second language acquisition. Learners initially listen to utterances, then imitate them and later develop reading and writing skills based on this auditory foundation" (p.208). Earlier research viewed listening as a passive process involving the simple reception of information (Nation & Newton, 2008). However, more recent studies conceptualize listening as an active and dynamic process in which learners construct meaning by integrating linguistic input with prior knowledge (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

Research findings suggest that listening plays a central role in early language development and should therefore be taught explicitly and systematically, as listening comprehension is foundational to overall communicative competence and language learning success (Wang & Yang, 2024; Goh, 2023). Studies emphasize that learners must be engaged actively during listening tasks rather than receiving input passively, as active listening promotes deeper cognitive processing (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Sihite et al., 2024). Thus, teachers are encouraged to give special attention to listening instruction, despite the challenges associated with teaching this skill and the difficulties reported by learners in language programs (Newton & Nation, 2020).

Although listening does not follow fixed rules like grammar instruction, research has identified effective pedagogical principles and activities, such as metacognitive strategy instruction, collaborative tasks, and multimedia integration, that can significantly enhance learners' listening ability (Wang & Yang, 2024; Shamsi & Bozorgian. 2024).

1. Knowledge needed for listeners:

Research over the past several years continues to show that successful SL/FL listening comprehension depends on the interaction of several types of knowledge sources. White (2008) identified three main knowledge sources that facilitate effective listening comprehension:

a. **Linguistic knowledge:** Recent studies confirm that linguistic knowledge especially vocabulary size plays a foundational role in learners' ability to perceive and decode spoken input. Learners with stronger vocabulary knowledge achieve higher listening comprehension scores because they recognize words and segment sounds more accurately in real time (Matthews et al., 2024).
b. **Contextual knowledge and predicative processing:** Contextual cues play a crucial role in listening comprehension. Learners who are trained to link spoken messages to situational context can better predict upcoming information and interpret meaning. This predictive ability enables learners to integrate linguistic input with broader contextual expectations (Muradova, 2025)
c. **Schematic or background knowledge:** This knowledge enables learners to understand how language is typically used in specific social situations. Learners with well-developed schemata can anticipate topic development and recognize appropriate language use within particular cultural and social contexts (Huang & Wang, 2026).

2. Listening activities:

Research supports the use of structured and interactive listening activities to develop listening comprehension skills. Nation and Newton (2008) reported that activities which require learners to actively respond to spoken input lead to improved listening accuracy and engagement. The following activities have been shown to be effective (Nation and Newton, 2008, pp. 44-46)

a. **Oral cloze activities**: encourage learners to predict meaning and actively process spoken input.
b. **Picture ordering tasks:** help learners connect spoken descriptions with visual representations, strengthening comprehension.
c. **Same-and-different activities:** promote peer interaction and careful listening.
d. **Listen-and-choose tasks:** enhance learners' ability to discriminate details.
e. **Listen-and-draw activities:** develop learners' ability to follow spoken instructions accurately.
f. **Padded questions:** provide opportunities for learners to listen to meaningful input and respond personally.

Developing Speaking Skills:

For many years, it was believed that "teaching the spoken language is largely conceived of as teaching students to pronounce written sentences" (Brown & Yule, 1983, p.2). However, research has shown that this approach often fails to prepare learners for real-life communication. More recent studies emphasize speaking as a core communicative skill that involves generating appropriate utterances according to context and purpose (Goh & Burns, 2012).

Ur (1996) argued that speaking is the most important of the four language skills because language proficiency is judged by oral ability (cited in Al Hosni, 2014). This claim is further supported by research highlighting the central role of oral communication in language assessment (Fulcher, 2015).

Research findings indicate that effective speaking instruction goes beyond memorization and repetition. Learners must be taught how to produce language that fulfils communicative functions such as greeting, requesting, apologizing, and expressing opinions. Scrivener (2005) highlighted that "there is no point knowing a lot about language if you can't use it" (p.146). Recent studies confirm that communicative language teaching enhances learners' functional language use and interactional competence (Littlewood, 2014). As a result, modern pedagogy emphasizes communicative competence as the primary goal of speaking instruction.

1. Knowledge needed for speakers:

According to Thornburg (2005), speaking competence is based on both extra-linguistic and linguistic knowledge.

a. **Extra-linguistic knowledge needed for speakers:** Sociocultural knowledge, including the understanding of the cultural norms, social roles, and contextual appropriate language use beyond grammar and vocabulary, is essential for effective communication in a second and foreign language. Learners who lack this knowledge may produce sentences that are grammatically correct but pragmatically inappropriate. This gap often leads to miscommunication or misunderstanding, especially in culturally sensitive acts such as requesting, apologizing, or declining offers (Mokoro, 2024). Research in instructed pragmatics shows that explicit instruction in sociocultural norms and pragmatic features of language improve learners' pragmatic competence (Taguchi, 2015; Ishihara & Cohen, 2014). In other words, SL or FL learners will be able to choose appropriate expression based on context, social relationships, and communicative intent.
b. **Linguistic knowledge:** Research identifies several components of linguistic knowledge essential for speaking:
-   **Genre knowledge**: Studies demonstrate that understanding transactional and interactional purposes helps learners adjust language use appropriately (Thornbury, 2005; Brown & Yule 1983; Hyland, 2019).

- **Discourse knowledge**: findings indicate that learners who use discourse markers can manage turn-taking and produce coherent spoken discourse effectively (McCarthy & Carter, 2014).
- **Speech acts**: Research in pragmatics shows that awareness of speech acts improves learners' communicative effectiveness (Taguchi, 2015).
- **Politeness**: Studies highlight the explicit instruction in politeness strategies helps learners avoid pragmatic failure (Ishihara & Cohen, 2014).
- **Grammar**: Research differentiates between spoken and written grammar, as the former is informal and happens spontaneously in real-time, whereas, the latter need to be planned as it more complex (Bygate, 2009; Biber et al., 2011).
- **Vocabulary**: Vvocabulary is the heart of any language; without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, learners cannot understand or produce the SL or FL accurately. Vocabulary size has been shown to strongly predict speaking fluency and accuracy (Cardenas, 2001; Nation & Nation. 2001).
- **Phonology**: Pronunciation is considered the main difficulty when we are talking about speaking (Nation and Newton, 2008). Stress and intonation significantly affect intelligibility (Bronghton, 1978; Levis, 2021).

2. **Speaking activities:**

   Empirical research supports the use of communicative speaking activities to develop oral proficiency. Harmer (2007) and Thornbury (2005) found that activities simulating real-life situations increase learner motivation, confidence, and fluency.

a. **Role Play and simulation** foster communicative confidence and reduce speaking anxiety.
b. **Discussions** promote critical thinking and opinion expression.
c. **Conducting interviews** provides opportunities for structured spontaneous speaking.
d. **Information-gap activities** encourage meaningful interaction and negotiation of meaning.
e. **Story construction and storytelling** have been shown to enhance fluency, reduce hesitation, and improve narrative competence.

Methodology:
- **Research Design:** This study adopts a qualitative research design using a narrative literature review approach to explore the factors associated with successful language learners and their implications for teaching listening and speaking skills. The qualitative narrative review approach was selected over quantitative or experimental methods because it allows for a comprehensive synthesis of existing research, providing an in-depth understanding of learners' characteristics, strategies, learning environments, and teaching processes that contribute to language learning success.
- **Research Approach:** The study follows a narrative review method, which involves systematically collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing findings from empirical and theoretical studies related to successful second and foreign language learning. Unlike meta-analyses or systematic reviews that focus on quantitative data, this approach emphasizes the integration of diverse perspectives, interpretations, and pedagogical insights. This approach is particularly suitable for examining complex phenomena such as language learning, where cognitive, affective, social, and environmental factors interact in dynamic ways.
- **Data Collection:** Sources for this study included peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and conference papers published over the past five decades between (1970-2025). Search strategies focused on the following keywords and their combinations: "good language learners", "successful language learning", "learner characteristics", "learning strategies", "listening skills", "speaking skills", "teaching processes", and "learning environment". Databases consulted included ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, and Google Scholar.

Inclusion criteria:
1. Focus on SL/FL learning.
2. Investigated learner, strategic, environmental, or instructional factors.
3. Addressed listening and/or speaking skills.
4. Published in English and Arabic
- **Data Analysis:** The collected literature was analyzed using qualitative content analysis, focusing on identifying recurring themes, patterns, and relationships among learner's factors, strategies, and teaching practices. **The analysis followed a multi-step process:**
1. **Familiarization:** Reading and re-reading the selected studies to gain a holistic understanding of the research landscape.
2. **Coding:** Highlighting relevant information regarding learner characteristics, strategies, environment, teaching processes, and listening and speaking development.

3. **Theme development:** Grouping codes into overarching themes corresponding to the main research questions: (a) factors contributing to successful language learning, and (b) instructional practices that foster listening and speaking skills.
4. **Synthesis:** integrating findings from different studies to construct a cohesive narrative that highlights both theoretical and practical implications for SL/FL teachers.

This process ensured that the synthesis remained faithful to the original studies while allowing the identification of broader patterns and pedagogical insights.

Discussion:

This study synthesized research on GLLs to examine how learner-related factors, strategies, learning environments, and teaching processes contribute to listening and speaking development. The findings confirm that successful oral proficiency results from the integration of cognitive, affective, and instructional dimensions, supported by a shift from traditional, teacher-centred to interactive, learner-centred instruction.

The literature shows that successful learners view language primarily as a means of communication, not merely as an academic subject. This finding supports the claim that "effective learners see language as a tool for communicating rather than as a subject on curriculum to be mastered for the purposes of examination success" (Wong & Nuan, 2011, p. 155).

The findings further demonstrate that learner-related factors, especially motivation, attitude, self-confidence, and willing to communicate, play a crucial role by reducing anxiety and increasing participation in oral tasks.

In addition to affective factors, the discussion confirms the importance of strategic behaviour in distinguishing successful from less successful learners. GLLs employ cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies to manage listening and speaking, such as predicting content, monitoring comprehension, planning utterances, and seeking feedback.

The learning environment also influences oral skill development. Supportive, low-anxiety classrooms that promote interaction and learner autonomy provide essential opportunities for meaningful input and output. In addition, informal and digital environments extend exposure to authentic language use. Teaching processes mediate these effects, with learner-centred practices such as task-based learning and communicative activities enabling learners to transform linguistic knowledge into communicative competence.

Overall, successful listening and speaking development emerges from the dynamic interaction of learner characteristics, strategic behaviour, supportive environments, and effective teaching practices. The findings support a developmental perspective in which the qualities of GLLs can be cultivated through informed, research-based pedagogy.

Pedagogical Implications: Using Factors of Good Language Learners to Improve Listening and Speaking:

Research on good language listeners and speakers offers important pedagogical implications for teaching listening and speaking skills. Rather than viewing the characteristics of successful learners as innate abilities, studies emphasize that these factors can be systematically developed through informed instructional practices (Naiman et al., 1978; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990).

One major implication concerns the explicit teaching of learning strategies. GLLs tend to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning, especially during listening and speaking tasks (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Teachers can promote these strategies by explicitly modelling pre-listening planning (e.g., predicting content, activating background knowledge) and encouraging post-listening reflection and self-evaluation. Empirical studies indicate the metacognitive instruction in listening leads to significant improvements in comprehension and oral interaction (Teng, 2025).

Another characteristic of successful language learners is their willingness to communicate (WTC) and their ability to manage affective variables such as anxiety and self-confidence. Learners who excel in speaking and listening are more likely take risks, tolerate ambiguity, and actively seek opportunities for interaction. Teachers can draw on this insight by creating low-anxiety classroom environments. Techniques such as scaffolded discussions, pair and group work, and task-based speaking activities increase learner engagement and oral participation. Recent research shows that supportive classroom climates and positive teacher-student relationships enhances learners' oral performance and listening engagement (Derakhshan et al., 2024).

Motivation and learner autonomy are also central factors distinguishing successful language learners. High proficient speakers and listeners often demonstrate strong motivation and a sense of ownership over their learning (Ushioda, 2020). Teacher can foster these qualities by incorporating learner choice in speaking topics, encouraging self-directed listening outside the classroom (e.g., podcasts and videos), and guiding learners in setting personal listening and speaking goals. Studies

suggest that autonomy-supportive teaching practices contribute to improved oral fluency and listening comprehension, particularly in EFL context (Oga-Baldwin, 2019).

Furthermore, successful language learners make extensive use of input and interaction. They actively seek comprehensible input and negotiate meaning during communicative exchanges, which is especially crucial for the development of listening and spaeking skills (Kawai, 2008; Long, 2014). Teachers can maximize meaningful exposure to authentic spoken language by designing interactive tasks such as information-gap activities, role-plays, and problem-solving discussions. Research on interaction shows that learners regularly engage in interactive listening and speaking tasks develop stronger discourse competence and pragmatic awareness (Saito & Plonsky, 2019).

Finally, successful language learners demonstrate a strong capacity for reflection and self-regulation, particularly in the development of oral skills. They are able to notice gaps in their listening and speaking performance and take steps to address them (Oxford, 2016). Teachers can encourage this process through recorded speaking tasks and guided self-assessment using clear rubrics. Recent studies highlight that reflective oral practice, supported by teacher feedback, leads to sustained improvement in pronunciation, fluency, and listening accuracy (Saito. 2021).

In sum, by aligning classroom practices with the establish factors that characterize successful language learners, strategic behaviour, willingness to communicate, motivation, interaction, and self-regulation, teachers can significantly enhance learners' listening and speaking skills. Rather than viewing these factors as learners-dependent traits, effective instruction treats them as teachable and developable components of successful oral communication.

Suggestions for SL/FL Teachers to Improve Instructional Practices:

In the light of the factors discussed in previous sections, teachers may consider the following recommendations to support learners' development:

1. **Fostering motivation:** Motivation is a key factor in successful language learning (Ushioda, 2008). Teachers can enhance learners' motivation by encouraging reflection on personal achievement, setting achievable goals, and promoting positive thinking. Regular feedback and recognition of learners' progress can further sustain engagement and effort.

2. **Considering age:** While younger learners may have advantages in pronunciation and older learners may be stronger in grammatical understanding, age should not be viewed as a limiting factor in language acquisition. According to Krogulec (2019) "teachers should make sure that the classroom environment they create answers the needs of older students, who volunteer to be there both to learn and to enjoy, perhaps in equal measure" (p.191). Teachers should design materials and activities that are appropriate for learners of different ages, ensuring that lessons appeal to learners' interests and cognitive abilities.

3. **Support diverse learning styles:** As effective learners employ varied strategies and learning modalities, teachers should provide a range of tasks that accommodate different learning styles, including visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, individual, and group-based approaches (Husnia et al., 2023; Salam & Arifin, 2020). Such instructional flexibility enables learners with different preferences to success.

4. **Building positive attitudes:** Attitude is a strong predicator of language learning success (Syukur, 2016; Lubis 2015). Teachers can foster positive attitudes by stimulating interest in the subject, offering positive feedback, and providing regular motivational activities. Encouraging learners to see the practical and social value of language use can further enhance engagement and persistence.

5. **Accommodating different personalities:** Effective instruction requires recognition of learners' individual personality traits. Teachers should provide a variety of classroom activities that allow students with different personalities to participate comfortably and meaningfully, ensuring that both introverted and extroverted learners benefit from language practice.

6. **Integrating language learning strategies:** Research shows that successful learners employ specific strategies to enhance autonomy and learning efficiency (Naiman et al., 1978; Mahalingam and Yunus, 2016). As Mahalingam and Yunus (2016) noted, "learners should be given opportunities to choose and apply language learning strategies which suit them the best" (p. 365). Accordingly, teachers should model these strategies in class while allowing learners to select those that best match their individual preferences.

7. **Creating a supportive learning environment:** Supportive classroom climates characterized by teacher empathy, encouragement, and low anxiety have been shown to enhance learners' willingness to communicate and increase language output (Li, Chengchen et al., 2025; Aomr, 2020; Wang et al., 2021). Morover, a positive and non-threatening classroom environment significantly facilies language acquisition (kiatkheeree, 2018). Teachers should therefore aim to create space

where learners feel comfortable taking risks, making mistakes, and engaging actively in listening and speaking tasks.

limitations and Directions for Future Research:

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. As a narrative review, its findings depend on the scope and selection of the literature and do not provide quantitative or causal evidence. Although studies from diverse contexts were included, differences across educational settings, proficiency levels, and cultural backgrounds were not systematically examined.

Future research could address these limitations through systematic reviews or meta-analyses focused on listening and speaking development. Empirical studies examining how instructional interventions shape learner strategies, motivation, and willingness to communicate across contexts would further enhance understanding.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, language learners differ in personality, attitude, and learning priorities. As a result, teachers should avoid a one-size-fits-all approach, as strategies and activities suitable for high-level learners may not be effective for lower-level learners. Instruction should be tailored to learners' individual characteristics and needs, particularly in the development of listening and speaking skills. Designing activities that maximize learners' opportunities to listen and speak fluently remains a central task for effective SL/FL teachers. By integrating knowledge of learner characteristics, strategies, environmental factors, and teaching processes, teachers can create learning experiences that promote autonomy, confidence, and communicative competence,

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